

A New Race of Scimitar Babbler from Szechwan.

BY MRS. B. P. HALL

Received 5th March, 1954

Pomatorhinus ruficollis usheri new race.

Description : Closest to *P. r. styani* Seebohm, of the Yangste Valley, but with the back slightly more olive and the under tail-coverts and the streaking on the underparts olive-grey with no trace, except for a faint tinge in one specimen, of the ochre-brown that is characteristic of *styani*. The colour of the streaking is more similar to, but not so dark as, that of *P. r. godwini* Kinnear, of Bhutan. Two males and three females of the new race have the following measurements: Wing ♂ 75–76, ♀ 73–74; bill ♂♀ 20–22mm.

Distribution : Known only from the type locality.

Type : In the British Museum. Adult Male. Chuan Chi Mine, near Pei Pei, Central Szechwan (lat. 29deg. 47min.N.; long. 106 deg. 25min.E.). 3rd February 1945. Collected by Mr. A. Morrison, British Museum Reg.No.1946.49.1243.

Measurements of Type. Wing 76; tail 79; bill 22mm.

Colours of Soft Parts. Iris dark chestnut; bill, black above, whitish below; feet bluish (brown or dark brown in other specimens).

Remarks : I have named this race with some hesitation as it seems that in a highly variable species such as this there may be no limit to the variations found in isolated populations in the mountains of Central Asia and it may well prove impractical to distinguish them all by name. On the other hand it seems the only way at present in which to draw attention to the characters of the Pei Pei population which are especially interesting in that, in the colour of the underparts, this race is in no way intermediate between any two of the surrounding races, while in the colour of the back it shows affinities with *P. r. similis* Rothschild, of north-western Yunnan, and not, as would be expected, with the chestnut backed *P. r. eidos* Bangs, of western and south-western Szechwan. The complexity of the geographical variation in southern Szechwan is indicated by two single specimens in the British Museum from Chungking, less than 50 miles south of Pei Pei and from Tungse, northern Kweichow, which are closest to *styani* but intermediate between that race and *P. r. stridulus* Seebohm, of southern China, including the greater part of Kweichow.

Delacour (L'Oiseau, 1940: 63–66) unites *P. ruficollis* with the white-breasted *P. schisticeps*, but I do not feel able to accept this view while the apparent overlap of the two forms in the Himalayas and Upper Burma is not satisfactorily understood.

The differences between the five specimens of the new race and others in National collection were first noticed by Mr. H. B. Usher when identifying the Morrison collection. As he has since retired it seems appropriate that they should be named after him.